

Message

From: Mylott, Richard [Mylott.Richard@epa.gov]
Sent: 12/5/2019 4:00:17 AM
To: Mutter, Andrew [mutter.andrew@epa.gov]; Thomas, Deb [thomas.debrah@epa.gov]
CC: Wall, Dan [wall.dan@epa.gov]; Smidinger, Betsy [Smidinger.Betsy@epa.gov]; Sopkin, Gregory [sopkin.gregory@epa.gov]; Barnicoat, Dana [Barnicoat.Dana@epa.gov]; Partridge, Charles [Partridge.Charles@epa.gov]; Wardell, Christopher [Wardell.Christopher@epa.gov]; Greene, Nikia [Greene.Nikia@epa.gov]; Sethuraman, Jag [Sethuraman.Jag@epa.gov]
Subject: Montana Standard: County, EPA, state pledge further look at meconium study

Initial article posted this eve.

- DAVID McCUMBER david.mccumber@mtstandard.com
- https://mtstandard.com/news/local/county-epa-state-pledge-further-look-at-meconium-study/article_fa0ab36a-3e4f-5dee-8d0e-bf3bb2bcb8bc.html#tracking-source=home-top-story

An EPA toxicologist and Montana's lead epidemiologist both pledged Wednesday to help Butte-Silver Bow County validate and further explore the results of a just-published health study showing startling levels of heavy metals in Butte babies' meconium.

Dr. Katie Hailer, chemistry department head and associate professor at Montana Technological University, is a co-author of the study. She came to an early-morning meeting of the Butte Board of Health Wednesday to discuss the study.

Also present were EPA toxicologist Charles Partridge and Montana epidemiologist Laura Williamson.

Hailer began by pointing out that this is not the first study she has done showing elevated levels of metals in Butte residents.

In a study published last year, Hailer found elevated levels of arsenic and manganese in blood and hair samples of a small group of test subjects, compared with levels found among the same number of Bozeman residents.

She said she pursued both studies out of the belief "not enough monitoring work" has been done in Butte relative to metals.

She described the very small-scale meconium study as "a pilot" intended to test whether a larger study was warranted.

Hailer said the study was designed to answer the questions "Can we collect samples at St. James? Can we analyze them, and will we detect metals, and at what levels?"

Besides the very small sample size — 15 babies in Seattle and 17 in a control group in South Carolina — another limitation of the pilot study, Hailer said, was she had to agree to gather no identifying information or do any followup with the mothers and babies in the study.

She described her process of collection: hospital officials notified her when each of the babies was born, and she got verbal permission from the mothers to take the samples. If the birth was difficult or any issues arose with the baby, samples were not taken, she said.

She said she used special diapers with no metals content and special collection bags to avoid contaminating the samples. She kept no identifying information — including date of birth — on any of the subjects.

And, she stressed, she had no idea where any of the mothers lived. "They could have been traveling through on I-90," she said.

"I'm happy to share in excruciating detail" the information about the study, "if anyone wants to replicate this," Hailer said.

She added she and the other authors, Drs. Suzanne McDermott and Jamie Lead of the University of South Carolina, were "shocked" by the results, which she said showed a thousandfold difference in the levels of metals between the Butte group and a South Carolina control group.

"We went through the math again, asking 'Did we make a mistake?' and the answer was no, this was the data," she said. "The results are the results."

Given those results, the co-authors of the study applied for a grant for a larger study of 175 Butte babies (along with a 175-person control group). Such a study would follow mothers and babies for an extended period. That application, to the National Institute for Environmental Health, was denied. Hailer said she does not yet have an explanation for that denial, but the co-authors planned on reapplying.

She said the "Butte part" of such a study would cost at least \$1.1 million.

Partridge, the EPA toxicologist, said he would have to verify the results, either testing "splits," or retained parts, of the meconium, or being able to access and analyze the study's raw data, before taking further action.

Later Wednesday afternoon, the Region 8 EPA office issued the following statement:

"EPA values the development of information that has the potential to inform our efforts to secure public health at Superfund sites. We are currently reviewing the recently released report with our partners at ATSDR (The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry) and Montana DEQ, and have asked the report's authors for additional information to help us understand the data and assist our evaluation. EPA will be working with the Superfund Health Study Working Group in Butte to review the report and discuss next steps with our partners and the community."

Ed Banderob, president of the Greeley Neighborhood Community Development Corp., implored the county to take the study seriously and follow up.

"This is the fourth study that indicates hazardous-to-human-health heavy metals in our mining community," he said. "It's about time. We don't care about the fish. We don't care about the creek. We care about human health. Let's do something."

Indications are the county is doing exactly that.

"This study has the community talking and alarmed," County Health Officer Karen Sullivan said. "Immediate followup is warranted."

Williamson said the state is ready to "team up with the County Health Department to line out exactly what you want to look at."

Partridge said that the study of meconium "is a new area for me to look into," but there are "reference levels" to use in analyzing the study.

"It's on our radar," he said. "It's gotten our attention."

From: Mutter, Andrew <mutter.andrew@epa.gov>

Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2019 4:39 PM

To: Thomas, Deb <thomas.debrah@epa.gov>

Cc: Mylott, Richard <Mylott.Richard@epa.gov>; Wall, Dan <wall.dan@epa.gov>; Smidinger, Betsy <Smidinger.Betsy@epa.gov>; Sopkin, Gregory <sopkin.gregory@epa.gov>; Barnicoat, Dana <Barnicoat.Dana@epa.gov>; Partridge, Charles <Partridge.Charles@epa.gov>; Wardell, Christopher <Wardell.Christopher@epa.gov>; Greene, Nikia <Greene.Nikia@epa.gov>; Sethuraman, Jag <Sethuraman.Jag@epa.gov>

Subject: Re: FOR REVIEW: Mt standard request for EPA comment on Butte meconium study

Thx Deb. Will send to the MT Standard in a few.

Andrew

Sent from my iPhone

On Dec 4, 2019, at 4:30 PM, Thomas, Deb <thomas.debrah@epa.gov> wrote:

Well done. Looks good.

Debra H. Thomas
EPA Region 8
Deputy Regional Administrator
303-312-6298

On Dec 4, 2019, at 5:28 PM, Mutter, Andrew <mutter.andrew@epa.gov> wrote:

Thanks Rich. Betsy and I recommend one part below. We are waiting on Greg's review before we send back to the Standard.

Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)

Best regards,

Andrew

Andrew Mutter

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From: Mylott, Richard <Mylott.Richard@epa.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2019 3:16 PM
To: Wall, Dan <wall.dan@epa.gov>; Smidinger, Betsy <Smidinger.Betsy@epa.gov>; Sopkin, Gregory <sopkin.gregory@epa.gov>; Thomas, Deb <thomas.debrah@epa.gov>
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Draft, deliberative

Thanks, Dan and all. Also just spoke with:

- 1.) Nikia- who emphasized the importance of mentioning the health study working group specifically. Added at the end below...
- 2.) Andrew- who feels staying safe and avoiding the perception of being premature in stating Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP) might be best at this point.

Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)

Rich

Ex. 6 Personal Privacy (PP)

Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)

From: Wall, Dan <wall.dan@epa.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2019 2:59 PM
To: Mylott, Richard <Mylott.Richard@epa.gov>; Smidinger, Betsy <Smidinger.Betsy@epa.gov>; Sopkin, Gregory <sopkin.gregory@epa.gov>; Thomas, Deb <thomas.debrah@epa.gov>
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Charlie and I are both fine with this statement. I spoke with ATSDR (Kai) and he is as well. I was unable to contact the state epi or toxicologist to see if they are ok being included. Is there someone else at the state we should run this by?

From: Mylott, Richard <Mylott.Richard@epa.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, December 4, 2019 2:43 PM
To: Smidinger, Betsy <Smidinger.Betsy@epa.gov>; Wall, Dan <wall.dan@epa.gov>; Sopkin, Gregory <sopkin.gregory@epa.gov>; Thomas, Deb <thomas.debrah@epa.gov>
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Draft, deliberative

Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)

Please advise on language below... thanks in advance.

Rich Ex. 6 Personal Privacy (PP)

Ex. 5 Deliberative Process (DP)